

# Long, Long Ago Oral History Project



## Volume 4, Issue 5

## **Provenance**

The Volume 4, Issue 5 manuscript is composed of the Gloria Molina Interview. The Gloria Molina Interview was done at Suva Intermediate School in the fall of 1999. The interview was conducted in English by the entire membership of the Long, Long Ago Oral History Project.

The interview tapes are lodged at the Long, Long Ago Oral History Project and the interview has been reduced to narrative form and published by the Long, Long, Oral History Project as part of the "Latino Series".

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## **Gloria Molina**

Gloria Molina is a native of Los Angeles; she is the oldest of ten children. She graduated from El Rancho High School in Pico Rivera, California, and attended East Los Angeles and Rio Honda Colleges. She is married to businessman Ron Martinez, and they have one daughter.

Before being elected to public office in 1982, she served in the Carter White House as a deputy Presidential Personnel.

Since being elected to public office 1982, she has served as State Assemblywoman for the 56<sup>th</sup> District, on the Los Angeles City Council, and the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors. Gloria Molina, is the first Latina in history to serve in the California State Legislature, on the Los Angeles City Council, and the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors.

Gloria Molina is best known for her strong commitment to community empowerment. She has a legislature history of standing up for the average citizen against almost insurmountable odds.

Active in local as well as national issues, she has been listed by Working Woman magazine as "one of the ten women of power in the 90's" and was identified by Time magazine, in 1996 as one of the Democratic Party's "10 Rising Stars." Hispanic Business Magazine has also recognized her as one of the most influential Hispanics in the Nation.

## Gloria Molina

It's a pleasure to be here this morning. I was encouraged to come today for this interview. I usually avoid going to intermediate schools. The reason I do is that most intermediate school children don't know what I do and it's valuable, but its not all that interesting to them. Sometimes they don't know that it's anything that is added to their every day life. Someone on my staff, Miguel Santana, who attended this school and who did interviews here when he attended this school, said that it was a very, very valuable experience for him and he convinced me to come here today and he thought that I should come and be a part of your program. Now that I'm here, I am very glad that he invited me because he also told me that many of you have been preparing so you know a little bit about what I do and the kinds of things that I'm about and hopefully it will be a valuable experience for you as well to learn about government, particularly county government. Let me introduce you all to Miguel Santana, who attended this school.

I guess I will start with a very, very short brief remark and then I guess we will open it up for questions. Because that's always what makes it much more interesting is to listen to your questions and answer what your questions are. I think that when I was in school and I was your age, I really truly have little understanding about government and how government works. Certainly we were taught from time to time about how government functions and what a democracy was. But for the most part it was a hard and difficult thing for us to understand. It was particularly difficult for me because when they kept telling me that government was made up of people, all the people and that it served all the people, it was very hard for someone like myself, as Latino sitting there saying, "Well, there's no one there who looks like me. How

would they be representing my best interests?" And I remember sparking those kinds of questions as early as elementary school. And it is something that followed me all the way through as I started going on to high school and certainly as I went on to college and certainly working every day. I didn't have any interest in politics, I didn't have an interest in government but what I really felt is that if nothing else, it should look like the people in my community. The people in my community were very different from those who were serving in various governmental positions from local government all the way to the U.S. Congress and certainly the presidency of this country. But that is what I think inspired me to get involved in the political process and that is to at least start challenging government to try and make sure that it is responding to and meeting the needs of people in my community. And I call it activism and that is what we were involved in at the time and one of the reasons I got involved more so in government was because there were a lot of deficiency in our school system and kids were not getting the kind of education and attention that they should be getting. So there was a group that put together a school walk-out as they called it because they wanted to put emphasis on the fact that if Latinos and Chicanos walked out of school, maybe we could get them to pay attention to some of our issues. I was not a leader of any of that, I was one of the followers and as a good follower, I walked out of school and had other kids walk out with us and began my activism in the community and tried to get the school district to be much more attentive to the needs of children in our community. And because of that spark all kinds of activism and questions resulted. I never thought that I would be a part of government but here I am today because I learned a lesson very early in the process and it said that until you're there at the table being a part of making decisions, things that will never change. And I hope if nothing else, you will learn from today's experience that you should strive very, very hard to be at the table at what

ever profession or career and that is to try and be there and get there and be a part of bringing about those changes, not only for yourself but for your community. And it's a struggle but it can be done and one of the things that we should strive for every day. And I know that people like myself, who were part of the activists back then, are still working very, very hard to open doors for young people every day. We're eliminating some of the barriers and difficulties so that hopefully it may not be as difficult as it was for some of us. I am a first and I'm proud of it but at the same time I am sort of ashamed that there weren't people before me. I am the first Latino ever to get elected to the California State Legislature, which is where they make decisions every single day about your education, about the quality of our schools, about the teachers, and about your curriculum. And it was a shame that no Latino had ever been elected to the legislature. There were very few Latino politicians at that time. When I came, I wanted to work at local government and at that time there were no Latinos or Latinas serving on the city council of Los Angeles. I was one of the first Latinas ever to serve in that position. And of course recently but not all that recently, in 1991, I was elected to the LA County Board of Supervisors and hopefully I will have an opportunity to tell you how that happened, and became the very first Hispanic ever to serve on the LA County Board of Supervisors. Those are all firsts. What I think has been important to me is that I'm certainly not the last. Today in the California State Legislature, there are over 8 Latinas who are serving there today. Your district here is represented by one of them. Martha Escutia, who is very aggressive and very good in fighting for the best interests of her constituents. And I am very proud that there are good people who have followed. We have had Latinas in the U.S. Congress, which we are very, very proud of as well and so things have changed. Little by little, we are at the table and little by little we are to bring about changes and our biggest hope is that many of you are going to get those kinds of

opportunities and I hope that you are going to be part of effect these changes. I am going to be telling you about myself, telling you about what I do, and certainly responding to everything else that you would like me to respond to. With that, I am going to open up.

**Have you ever thought of running for mayor of Los Angeles?**

Let me answer it this way. I would love to be the mayor of Los Angeles. I think that would be a wonderful position for me. I think I could do a lot of wonderful things. I am very interested in trying to bring back a city that is working for everybody, that would bring racial harmony, that would change the quality of our neighborhoods dramatically. I would really bring leadership in trying to bring a community together instead of being divided as it is today. Unfortunately, because of politics, I'm not so sure that I would have a very good chance of getting elected for two reasons. One is money. Now, more and more rich people are running for these positions with their own money. I'm not a rich person. I work every single day and earn my living. I don't come from a wealthy family. And it would be very, very hard for me even to raise the money because some of the issues that I represent, like sometimes I'm against the insurance companies and against bank companies. I'm against, sometimes, the very organizations that give a lot of money to the campaigns. I'm against them in most instances because I have to fight them because they are not providing the best services. So it would be hard to convince them to give me money. That would be one thing.

The second thing is, do you know what controversy means, that sometimes I am involved in issues that are controversy. That means that they are not very popular. For example, I had to take a strong leadership role in an initiative, a couple of years, called Proposition 187. Do you know what that is? Well, it was an issue where a group of people wanted to put a law in place that said that children who are undocumented or whose parents are undocumented can not attend

our public schools and can not receive the benefits that government provides. That's a short answer for it. I was opposed to that and I took a very, very strong position in trying to raise money and trying to defeat that proposition. There was a lot of leadership in the Latino community but in the non-Latino community there were a lot of people who felt that I actually should not have taken that position because after all I am a government official and that I should only represent the interests of the citizens, not the non-citizens. So people would be critical of me. I am involved in a lot of those controversial issues, in not very popular positions. And so sometimes people want in their leaders somebody who will go along all the time and not be controversial. And I can't guarantee that for them. So, it would be a tough thing to do. I think I could do very well. It would be tough in a campaign. Maybe you'll take an opportunity. And we'll kind of pat down the grass for you so that when you become old enough, you can be the first Latino mayor of Los Angeles. That should be very nice.

**What do you think of Proposition 227?**

I am opposed to Proposition 227. Do you know what that is? Proposition 227 is another initiative. Again this is a process where they put it on the ballot so that your parents who are voters have an opportunity to vote yes or no. There is a proposition right now that says that there should not be bilingual education in the state of California. And I'm against it and there are many of us who are against it because we think that there should be an effective bilingual education program in the state of California. Now I do think that every single child should be taught English but at the same time I do think that there are many children who are mono-lingual Spanish or mono-lingual in another language and they enter the school system and they don't have an opportunity to be educated at the very beginning because they first have to learn the language. I was one of those. I was totally Spanish speaking when I was in



kindergarten. I didn't learn English until about the third or fourth grade. When I got to the fifth grade and sixth grade I was put into a remedial reading program and remedial math program because I didn't learn any basics from the beginning years. And I am very fortunate that I was able to catch up but I remember many of my other little friends from the same neighborhood who did not. When we were in high school, they were put into what they called a slower classroom as compared to some of us. But I think that's what happens, it can create problems for you in the future if you don't have an opportunity to get an education as early as possible. There are bad bilingual programs but most of them are quite good and I really think that politics shouldn't enter into the classroom and shouldn't dictate the curriculum and what you learn everyday. And that's why I'm opposed to it.

**What was your childhood goal?**

Well, you know as a child, it's interesting, I was brought up in a traditional Latino family. And so goals like going on to college, going onto this profession, were not all that available. I was impressed by teachers and I thought that maybe I could be a teacher. Although later on, I thought that is something that I certainly don't want to do. I admire teachers tremendously but it's an awful lot of luck. I really had an interest in becoming a fashion designer when I was a kid. I found out very quickly as I was looking at what you needed and getting all of these books from the library about becoming a fashion designer, was that I wasn't a very talented artist and I think that you needed good skills in that regard so I started changing my goals. But I did know this when I was a child, I did know that I respected my mother and what she did every day. One of the things I wanted to do besides being a mom right after high school was that I wanted to have a career. And I thought that maybe going on to college would give me that opportunity. Which is exactly what I did even though it was very difficult. But I think that nowadays it's very

different. I think that now kids, many of you, can look at any career. The reason is that you see those faces there. There are many people there who are like you and you can strive for many of those things. There are many of us who are going to fight vigorously for you to get the opportunity to do that. So hopefully, many of you are setting high goals for what you want to do. You should look at what you need to do in order to get there because you know it starts very early. For an example, for a fashion designer it's important to start learning to become one very early by learning the different things to do that so that you can prepare in high school and college for it. But like anything else, any career, you should investigate what it is so that you learn what things you need to do so that; you can start preparing yourself. You should also know today there are no limits to what you can do.

**Are you always working?**

Yes, I am usually always working. We don't have set hours per se. We work every day and I work a lot of weekends. I try and keep some days for my family. But this Saturday I have to attend a labor rally. I have a couple of events this Saturday and I always have events in the evening. So I guess I'm always working. But even when I go to Home Depot to go shopping, there was always people who say, "Ay, Senora Moina, can I speak with you for a few minutes?" and they take me aside and share what their concerns are or their criticism. And so I'm always working. Most politicians are and so we have to be prepared to be working all the time. But I enjoy it tremendously, I really do.

**What work have you done in helping human health and services?**

I have been involved in all kinds of legislation. Do you know what legislation is? Laws. When I was in the state legislation, we made a lot of state laws. One of the programs that I was involved with there was called a welfare program about working. It was call Welfare to Work.

It was called the Gain Program. I was one of the legislatures involved in that program. And now that I am here at the county I am involved in making sure that the program is working every day so that we can get people off of welfare and on to good effective jobs so that they can support families. I've always been involved in health care issues. I'm making sure that families get prenatal care, which is the care that they need before they have their babies so that they will have healthy babies. I have been involved in a lot of issues involving teen pregnancy. And I have been involved in a lot of issues recently to try to make sure that our large Latino population has access to health care, in trying to rebuild the hospitals and make sure that we have more clinics in our community so that people, even though they have no insurance, have access to health care, not only for their children but for themselves as well. So those are some of the issues, some of their initiatives, I have been involved in terms of health and welfare.

**How are you going to make it safe for us?**

Well, let me tell you what I do. This is one of my priorities. The question was how do I make it safer for children, for many of you. I have a very, very strong position about the safety of our neighborhoods. And it begins with this basic premise, you might disagree, I think that parents should be held responsible for the actions of their children. Do you know what that means? That means that if the kid gets in trouble, mommy and daddy get into trouble. And the reason that I believe that it is the responsibility of mom and dad to give you the guidance and the direction and the discipline, when you did something wrong. It's not government's responsibility. It's the parents' responsibility. So if you decide to go and paint graffiti at school and we catch you, then guess who's going to have paint it out, mommy and daddy. Why? Because they have to understand that they are responsible for your actions. What I am hoping this will do, if we continue to enforce it, and I do this for truancy. When you don't go to school,

you have to go to school and by state law it is mandated that you have to go to school, who do I punish? The parents. Parents are responsible for sending their children to school and hopefully what they will do is discipline you. Right. As least that's what my dad did with me and it worked very well. But again, I do that now so that we can start at an earlier age of making parents responsible for the actions of their children and hopefully curb the problems that we will have in the future in terms of the violence that we have. And so that is one of the things that I am doing and I'm also very, very involved in the truancy program that is here. It's been utilized in this particular immediate school called the ACT Program. In which we try and make sure that we monitor the attendance of these students and we counsel and we also insist with parents that they have good attendance for their children. And the other is curfew. That all children should be in by ten o'clock at night and if they're not, we penalize the parents. And do you know what the penalty is for the moms and dads? No, not money or jail. I send them to school. I send them to parenting classes for ten weeks. When the parent gets caught and the judge sentences them, they sentence them to ten weeks of parenting. They have to go in and learn how to be better parents. Do you think that is a good punishment for parents? (A loud yes in response from the audience). We're not trying to punish them. We're trying to make them better and stronger parents. But it's very tough. I have a fifth grader and every single day, it is a challenge trying to figure out how to give her guidance and directions. And it's very painful to discipline her but sometimes she needs to be disciplined because, again, sometimes she doesn't do what she needs to be doing every single day. So it's a kind of what we have to learn how to do. We do it in a way that is loving and caring because I want my daughter to have the best of what she can have and it's my responsibility that she get as much direction as possible so that's why I have to make sure that I am there to do that.

### **What ideas do you have for today's youth?**

Well, one of the things as far as for today's youth, I think that junior high and high school students should be demanding a better education. I really think that our schools are not doing as effective a job in meeting the needs of young people. And the thing is that I think that parents of junior high and high schools students have to start demanding that the schools do a better job in preparing you for the future. You know the reality is that it isn't just the basic education that you need any more. You really need to get into college and it's going to be very hard to get into college and so you should be bright, you should be smart, and you should be prepared so that you can get into college. And we need to work those ways so it is affordable for you to go into college. If you're not going to college, then you need to go into some kind of training or technical school, maybe in computers or some other kinds of careers. And so young people should be demanding of those things. Because you deserve from us all of the resources and all of the skills building now so that you're going to have a positive future. The other things for youth as well are that hopefully we can create a shield to protect you from some of the bad influences out there. I don't know how to do that. I'm trying to do that with my daughter now. The drug influences that are out there, the drinking too early influences and the violence influences out there. I sometimes wish there were some way that I could zip my child up into a plastic shield so that she could walk through school and those things would not be a part of her everyday life. I'm nervous. Those are the kinds of things that will lose opportunity for our youth. That is a hard thing but I think as parents, we need to find a way in which we can do it. The world is going to be so different for many of you as young people. I am very nervous, particular many of you are Latinos that are in this community, it is going to be hard because there are going to be so many, many of us and if we are not prepared to take the jobs, that we are

going to be in a situation of not having anything that we need and a small group of people at the top who have all the jobs and opportunities and we are going to be a community of dependency. I know that is hard to understand right now but I want you to know that if we don't build the skills in you so that you can be competitive for the future then I am very, very nervous that you will not have an opportunity to compete for good jobs and to have a good living and to have a good life. That's what I think many of us want for young people today. But the biggest concerns are the things that we can't control, drugs, alcohol, and violence. So hopefully we can try and prevent that but I encourage you to stay away from all of it and be very, very careful of it.

**Do you like being a woman politician?**

It's harder being a woman politician. Let me tell you why it's harder. Do you know what sexism is? What is it? It's when people don't think that women are equal to them. Do you know what racism is? Very similar, those are barriers. That's when people think that they are better than others are, right. And they're racist toward minorities and other folks. Sexism is the same thing. Sexism is when people think or men think that women can't do certain things and so they don't give you an opportunity. I've had to fight a lot of sexism as a politician. In fact, when I first ran in 1982 to represent this district in the state legislature, one of the things that they said about me was that she's a woman. She can't win. They said that Latino men would never support her. And one of the things that I did was that I would walk door to door and talk to people. And now there were really opportunities. People were not as sexist as people claimed they were. I won that seat at that time. But very since then, I continue to deal with sexist situations, with problems being a woman, and with problems of being a minority as well. Sometimes the things that I say and the things that I do are not treated the same thing as my counterparts who are men say. Sometimes when I am very forceful about something, they look

at it as being very negative. They may say, "Oh my goodness, isn't she cranky today" instead of saying I need to do this. I need to be very assertive about it. It needs to get done and I am as strong advocate as everyone else. But people misinterpret that and say, "Oh, she's a woman and oh so cranky about those things." But the point is that you deal with sexism all the time but very frankly I'm also very proud to be a woman politician. Because there are not enough of us and I think we bring quite a bit to politics. I think that we bring our passion and advocacy. We bring a lot of issues and have different point of views and I think that we are more solution-oriented. Most of the woman that I know in politics is in politics to move up the political system. They usually are involved to be solvers. And so I am very proud to be a member of a group of women who I see as getting elected every single day to the U.S. Senate, to Congress, to state and local government and every time that you see them, they are involved in solving problems. Most of the men that I know in politics are just involved in their re-election campaign and trying to move up in their position. That's why they are more powerful, I guess than some of the women today. I am very proud of the women who are involved in politics.

**What would you do if your child tagged a wall or ditched school?**

Well, if you were my child and I found out that you were not attending school, you would be severely punished. Right now, my daughter came home with something that is not acceptable in our home. She got a C in Math. (The audience proclaims, "a, C"? indicating that they think that it's not a big deal). That's not acceptable. She got a C. She's only allowed to get an A or B. She is not allowed to get a C. That's our rule. Now you might find that very severe but we work very hard to try to make sure that my daughter does well in Math and Science so that she's not going to be behind. And so, she got a C and she knew that she was supposed to get an A or B. We asked why she didn't get an A or B and we found out that it's

not that she doesn't know the material. The teacher said that she was sloppy, she was disorganized, and she never went back and corrected her problems. She knows how to do them but sometimes because she's so disorganized and messy, she just wants to finish up her test and start talking to her friends. And so he gave her a C. What we had to do was that we had to punish her, so she is not going to watch any TV at all. (The audience gives forth and astonished response). She is also not allowed to attend any of her girlfriend's birthday parties until she gets an A or B. (Another burst of astonishment from the audience). Let me tell you why I do that, O.K.? One of the things that is important to me as a mother is that I have to start teaching my daughter, as I think your parents have to start teaching you, that when you have a responsibility and you don't follow your responsibility, there are consequences. That means something will happen for that. Do you know what happens to parents who are not responsible for you? Government takes you away from them. So the reality is that we have a duty and a responsibility every single day. I have a responsibility for my daughter that she does well at school and she didn't do well. That is our standard and it's a high standard but she knows that she's got to improve that grade and then we take away those things. But this is part of the consequences and I know that it's a little bit severe. But when she decides that she's going to tag a wall or run away, I hope she remembers the consequences and that is that she's going to get punished for it and hopefully, what that's going to do is hopefully discourage her from taking on any of those acts. Again, that's part of what we need to do every day to develop discipline for our children and it's done in a loving way. I'm not trying to penalize or punish her just to be mean to her. I really want her to do well in Math. Not only that, my child is a very bright child and very smart, just like many of you here. You have the capability of getting A's and B's every single day but you've got to work at it, you've got to study, and you have to be organized and you have to go



back and check your work. You have to have pride in what you do every single day. Do you know what pride means? That it is important to you and that you are going to be proud of it and that's all that we are trying to instill. So I start very early and that's what we are trying to instill. So you can imagine what the penalties would be if my daughter were caught writing on a wall.

**What can you do to stop graffiti?**

Oh, there are many ways that we can stop it. One is that we should eliminate all spray cans. That's what we should do. (Another audience response of astonishment and someone calls out, 'All of them?'). That's right all of them. No spray cans! Let me tell you why. We have such a problem in our communities that would be one of the best things but the paint companies would go crazy because they want to sell this stuff. And the big felt pens, you know what I'm talking about, we should eliminate them in these neighborhoods. They should not be available. We passed a law in the city of Los Angeles and I don't know if you have it here in this particular city, where if in fact you are selling spray cans, they must be in a locked area. In the city of Los Angeles we have been able to do that. Do they have that law here in Bell Gardens? (The audience says, "No"). That's one of the laws they should pass so that if people need spray paint to paint a bike or something, they at least have to go and unlock it. So that kids are not stealing this stuff or taking this stuff and then doing graffiti. The other issue is that when we catch kids doing graffiti, we really need to impose penalties on the parents and the parents hopefully will discipline their children because hopefully they will learn a lesson from that. And finally, the last thing that we need to do to eliminate graffiti is that we to paint it out immediately. If you paint it out immediately, those gang kids and those people who don't get their flaka out there for a long period of time will find other places to paint it. And so I know that it is a tough thing to do but it's working in our schools. I don't know if this school has it as

well; you paint out graffiti right away, right? And that eliminates it. This doesn't become a place where they can come and paint all of the time. We're going to get Cal Trans, which takes care of the freeways and stuff to come and paint it out right away. They don't do it as effectively. But one of the tools is that we paint it out all the time because we wear them out and one of the ways we eliminate it.

**Have any gang members used violence against the people painting over the graffiti?**

No. In Pico-Union where we had a clean-up project, where we were painting over graffiti, some kids shot in the air when we were painting over graffiti. So what we did was that we sent off for the L.A.P.D. and the L.A.P.D. stood there while we painted it out. We are not going to allow any gangster to terrorize us or to not allow us to do what is right. And that's what is important, you can't let gangs or graffiti artists take over our community. And you know the thing about graffiti is that it is the most disrespectful act that I have seen. And I know that some people are saying around here, "You know it's art." That's nonsense. That is baloney. How would you like me to come in and tattoo your patsa without your permission? It's the same act. It's a violation of people's personal property. And so I'm a real tough one when it comes to our laws and our rules. I really am tough and I think that we need to be because the reality is that graffiti makes our neighborhood, what does it do to our neighborhood, it makes it dirty and ugly. And all I know is that in my neighborhood and in the families that I represent, I want our neighborhoods to be clean and want them to be safe because you are entitled to them and you deserve the very best.

**How long have you been working?**

Well, I am the oldest of ten children. So I have been working for a long time. I started working part-time when I was fourteen and then I started working full-time the minute I got out

of high school after I graduated. I went to school at night and I had to help my family financially so I was part of bringing home a paycheck as well. But I have been working all my life, lots and lots of years. How do you all feel about working for the next 30 years of your life? Once you graduate from high school, a minimum of thirty years. (Audience responds that's too much work). Well, guess what? At a minimum, after you graduate from high school you are going to be working the next thirty years of your life. So I've always thought that it's better to do a job that you enjoy and that you really like because then you are going to be happier, right, because you are going to be going to some job where you are going to be unhappy. My father was a construction worker. He was a man who worked out in the streets every day with a jackhammer, opening up these streets. My dad worked very, very hard all of his life and it was painful to watch him come home. He was always dirty and he works so hard and he was always so tired. And I always said to myself, "Gosh, I have to work all my life. I don't want to do a job that is going to be that hard every single day." And he didn't want me to. He always felt that I could learn and get educated, I would have to work as hard as he did. And well I work as hard mentally as he did, it is still not as hard a job as he ever had and so hopefully you are going to select a job that you enjoy.

**Was it hard to become a Los Angeles County Supervisor?**

Yes, it was hard, very hard. There were a lot of people who opposed me. A lot of people who made it difficult to do something. What I do now is that I'm one of five members of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. And let me tell you what it was hard, not just hard for me but for a lot of people. Years ago there were only five white, Anglo-Saxon men who served on the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. Los Angeles County has approximately almost 10 million people and a very, very large number of minorities in Los

Angeles County. But we never could get representation from a minority on the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. You know what a minority is, right? Someone of color like myself, a Latino, African-American and Asian.

And there was always never that opportunity. The reason was that those guys who were serving there had decided how to cut up the lines for them to run for office. And what they did with our community was that they always put a little bit of the community in one district and another little bit in another district, and little bits in the other districts. So that we would never have a chance to get one of us elected now we tried for many years to go to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to say how unfair and inappropriate this was. Unfortunately they were very interested in staying elected so they never wanted to change the rules. So what we had to do is that we got some lawyers, a lot of the Latinos who had gone on to college and they had become lawyers, and they filed a lawsuit. Do you know what a lawsuit is? You go to court and demand a change. Well, we went to court and we won the first lawsuit that was illegal, inappropriate, and creating a very unfair situation to the best interests of the community. We won that lawsuit but the supervisors would still not change their lines. We had to go to the United States Supreme Court, the highest court in this country, and the United States Supreme Court ruled and forced Los Angeles County to change those lines. So because they were limiting our opportunity to ever get elected to this position, there was never a chance of getting elected. Once they changed those lines, they created a district where there were mostly Latinos or lots of Latinos. So I and eleven other people and I run for this seat. I was the one who got elected and it was a very hard campaign. But the bigger campaign was the campaign of trying to get a Hispanic elected to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. So it was a very, very hard thing to do, not just for me but for a lot of the people who worked on that lawsuit and tried

to bring opportunity to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. It's important that you know that. The reason why it's important is that you having to understand why it was important and how significant that was. It wasn't a group of people who accepted it and who said, "Oh well, they're not going to change it; let's go away." What they did was that they said, "We're going to challenge that. We're going to court and fight that." And even when they won in court and the Board of Supervisors still would not change, they said "We're going to continue to challenge you," and they went all the way to the United States Supreme Court and they forced it to happen. That tells us a lot about what can be done in the interests of our community. That's why important to know that you can fight for your rights, that your rights can be protected, and that you entitled to have that opportunity to fight for your best interests. O.K.?

**Is there more violence today?**

No, it was interesting. You read about more violence but what we have now are that we have really brought down the number of criminal statistics. We have had less gang violence than ever before. We have safer neighborhoods. That is true we have put in more police but I think the other thing that we are also doing is that we're putting in a lot of programs to create less crime and violence out in our communities. So it's coming down. We always have to have a good police department and law enforcement that is there. But we really would like to put more money in the investment of taking care of our children and making them safer in their own neighborhoods instead of putting money in police, jails, and those kind of things.

**How did you feel when you worked in the Carter Presidential Campaign?**

I had and opportunity to work in the Carter-Mondale campaign in the state of California in 1976. When Jimmy Carter was elected, I had an opportunity to go work at the White House so that was my very first time to go and work there. I got to tell for me that was like have you

ever been so overwhelmed. You can't believe that you are there. That's how I felt. I had an office. They gave me an office. I just couldn't believe until I got my first assignment that I had gotten the job. Because it was something that I never could even believe of happening. I had a great opportunity and I had to take advantage of it. Which is what my father had taught all my life. Every single day you should take advantage of every single opportunity that comes to you and so that's what I did. I made it a challenge to learn something every single day. To move forward and to enjoy as much as possible. It was a wonderful experience and I hope that you will have a similar experience as well.

**Do you support Al Checke?**

No I don't support Al Checke. I don't want to bring politics into the classroom but I am supporting Jane Harmon for governor of the state of California. I think Jane Harmon is someone that I have known for a while and she's very good. And so that's whom I'm supporting, I'm not supporting Al Checke.

**What are your future goals?**

Well, I have done much more than I ever thought I was going to do. In politics I really don't have any goals. I think I'm doing what I'd like to be doing and I probably won't move anywhere else in politics. But my real goal is that I am very interested in establishing a non-profit foundation or organization. In fact, I have a meeting today on it. I am very concerned about the fact that we don't have a lot of good educational opportunities for our children. And so I want to create an institute to train parents so that parents know more about our educational system so that they can challenge the schools and the school district to have better scores on their tests and to do better. Do you all know what your test scores were on your SATS or your Stanford tests? I really think that parents should know what that score is and that they should be

able to understand what that test is. And they should be insistent that the teachers prepare the children for that test. I don't necessarily think that preparing children for test is a good thing but it's a reality of our future. I mean you are going to be tested all of your lives. You would learn how to take tests, you should learn how to take tests, and so I really think that is a good opportunity. So I want to create a non-profit organization and really to empower parents, that is to give them the skills and resources to become challenging to their schools so they can get better test scores. My daughter's scores for the Stanford Test, they are going to be taking it next week. Are you going to be taking the Stanford Test, the are going to be taking it next week? Are you going to be taking the Stanford tests next week? (The audience says, "This week and next"). This is an important test and your parents should be very involved in how you are going to be taking that test so that next year when they get the score, they are going to know how you did and they should insist that you do as well as possible. In my daughter's school, they did very well. They got 83%, which is very high for Los Angeles Unified. She goes to Mt. Washington Elementary School. The problem is that down the street at Thelmo, which is at the bottom of our hill, got 43%, which is bad. That is inappropriate and that is an intolerable situation for those children. Those children should be scoring much better. So my ambition is to develop a non-profit organization in which I can begin the process of training parents to go in and start being more demanding but also be equally demanding of themselves. Just as I sit down with my child and got through her Math and try to get her to do well, we spend up to three hours, we need to train parents to help their children with their school work every single day. When I was a very bad speller, my mother who is totally Spanish speaking would help me with my spelling. She couldn't even pronounce the words but she was amazing in how she could help me. And I've

got to tell that by the time I was in the sixth grade, I was an excellent speller and winner of the spelling bees for my elementary school, which I was very proud of.

**Why did you decide to become a Los Angeles City Council Woman?**

Here's another example of what happens. When I was going to East Los Angeles College, I was a tutor. I signed up to be a tutor over at the Madevilla Housing Project. I was tutoring kids who were seventh, eighth, and ninth graders. I was very, very disappointed in that working with them, they couldn't read. They were having lots of problems with basic reading. I couldn't even tutor them because they couldn't read. And here they were being passed every year in the seventh, eighth, and ninth grade. And so I started challenging the schools. I started going to school board meetings and telling them that they had a responsibility to the kids. And that's really what started me and of course later on I was involved in the school walkouts and other things. And that's what inspired me to get involved in politics because I saw those faces and those faces are not anything like me and so I thought that I had to do something about it.

**How many times have I been elected?**

I was first elected to the California State Legislature in 1982 and I was re-elected every four years and then I ran in 1991 for the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. I ran for re-election once already and I had no opposition. I am now up for re-election. You might want to remind your parents. But I have no opposition. No one is running against me. So I am very fortunate. Hopefully it is because I am so effective in what I am doing. I am not sure that I am going to run again after this. I am looking at it right now. I am very interested in running this non-profit and getting involved with parents. So if that really works and it's effective, I might do it. That might be my priority.

**What are your hobbies?**



You know you've got to have hobbies. How many of you have hobbies? I've got to tell you that when I was at school, when you write your resume and it matters what you do, they always asked you what were your hobbies. I always thought I could put reading, I could put P.E., and all of those kinds of things. But now I have developed a hobby. I am a quilter. I spend a lot of time quilting. I've learned to become a quilter. I am fascinated by it. I buy all of the quilting books. I work on it in the middle of the night and it's part of what I consider my therapy. And I enjoy going and just sitting around quilting, sometimes with little old ladies. We make quilts a lot of the time. I enjoy quilting and I've always enjoyed sewing and so now I have an opportunity to put it together. And so that's my favorite hobby. With that I know you have to go back to school. I know that you would like to sit here a little bit longer but I have another event.

We are going to be honoring Jaime Escalante today. Do you know who Jaime Escalante is? (The audience generally knows who he is) he was a teacher at Garfield High School in East Los Angeles. He was a Math teacher and he got them to be very, very competitive academically and they did very well in scholastic testing. He broke a kind of a negative mold at Garfield High school and he is going to be honored today. Jaime Escalante is going to be honored on the Whittier Boulevard Walk of Fame. I am on my way today to pay tribute to Jaime Escalante. So I really look forward to seeing many of you. I first of all want to see you become voters. I want you to finish high school. Then I want to see all of you in college and then I want to see you voting for me or running against me. Because I really think you have a great opportunity to do wonderful things in this community. Thank you so much.